

8/28/2006

Responses to Comments on Draft RML IRF Emergency Response Plan

Letter #1



4-26-2006

To: David W. Lankford
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From: Charmell Owens; Emergency Preparedness Coordinator
Ravalli County Public Health Nursing Department
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Hamilton, MT. 59840

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to comment on the Rocky Mountain Lab's current emergency plan for the IRF.

For the past several years, Ravalli County Public Health in conjunction with the first responders of Ravalli County, have been training and working with the Rocky Mountain Lab on emergency response in Ravalli County.

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Rocky Mountain Lab has offered numerous training opportunities for area first responders such as the most recent Integrated Research Facility (IRF) Biosafety Level-4 Emergency Training Class held on April 11, 2006, along with several other symposiums sponsored by RML in conjunction with Ravalli County Public Health on West Nile and Pandemic Influenza. The Rocky Mountain Lab has also brought in numerous speakers that have been an integral part of educating the community on novel viruses.

I feel that the current emergency plan adopted by RML addresses the needs of the community of Ravalli County as well as the employees of Rocky Mountain Lab. It covers history of any organism studied, as well as the evolution, microbiology and epidemiology of a virus, diagnosis, treatment availabilities, and infection control issues. In addition to providing information on how the Rocky Mountain Lab will report exposures to our local Public Health Officer as well as to our Public Health Department.

[R1.1] The information on specific organisms to which Ms Owens refers is not contained in the actual IRF ERP, but was a part of the course Syllabus for the BSL-4 Emergency Training Class, which she attended. In the Lawsuit Settlement Order, RML/NIH agreed to “distribute a list of all BSL-4 pathogens being studied at the lab to all M.D.s, O.D.s, and N.D.s in Ravalli County every two years, along with signs and symptoms related to said pathogens.” Two examples of the information that RML will be providing on specific pathogens to the local health practitioners were included in the Syllabus, but are not part of the ERP.

We have found Rocky Mountain Lab to be an integral part of our team in the emergency response mechanisms in place in Ravalli County. We look forward to continuing our work with the Rocky Mountain Lab and appreciate the efforts they have made to provide us with information regarding the BSL-4 facility.

[R1.2] This comment properly notes that RML is an integral partner in public health and emergency management planning and programs in Ravalli County. The IRF ERP mentions that RML participates in the Local Emergency Planning Committee and the Ravalli County Terrorism Preparedness Task Force. However, in addition, the Associate Director for RML is a Core Member of the Ravalli County Health Emergency Advisory Team (HEAT). The role, membership, and methods for convening the HEAT are contained in Tab 5.50 of the Ravalli County Emergency Operations Guidelines. In brief, the HEAT team is the first group convened in the event of an actual or perceived public health emergency and will advise local emergency responders in their response to an incident. Reference to the HEAT was inadvertently omitted from the “Operations of the Biological Exposure Assessment Program, (BEAP)” on page 53 of the Draft IRF ERP, but the information is included in the current version.